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ABSTRACT

Brandon University's teacher education programs address the need to train Native people to teach in Indian schools. A mature entry policy allows students to enter the university without a high school diploma, provided they are at least 21 years old. Several programs lead to four-year Bachelor of Education degrees. Through the Program for Educating Native Teachers (PENT) students work as teacher assistance for 8 months of the year and spend two 6-week periods a year on campus doing course work. Throughout the year, two PENT staff members travel into the communities to supervise student teaching. Through the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP), centers have been developed and located in isolated communities. Every center has a coordinator who is responsible for local administration, student teaching, and community liaison work. Travelling professors deliver courses in a block of time and move on to the next center. Communities can apply for BUNTEP centers if they have the facilities for 20 to 30 applicants. Disadvantages and criticisms of the program are: (1) the programs are diluted; (2) some students lack English skills; (3) students lack opportunities outside their communities; and (4) course choices are limited. Advantages include the success rates of students, an emphasis on respect for Native cultures, adequate counselling for students, and the high rate of employment of graduates. (KS)

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University Reaches Out-
Programs Bring Education to Communities

by

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Profound changes have taken place in Native education in Manitoba over the past two decades, at least on reserves. They started early in the 1970s when studies of the success rates of Indian students suggested that the education systems in this country had failed Native people. Today, many Native people control their own schools at the local level. Local control is meaningless, however, without appropriate staff to teach in and to run them.

Brandon University was the first in this province to respond to the need in this area. The first breakthrough came more than 20 years ago when the university established a mature entry policy. Opportunities for high school education did not exist in the north at that time and few aboriginal students completed grade 12 in southern schools. The mature entry policy allowed, and continues to allow, students to enter the university whether or not they have high school education, provided they are at least 21 years old. Such students may attempt a maximum of 24 credit hours during a probationary period. They must obtain 'C' grades in at least 12 of the 24 credit hours attempted and must meet requisite academic performance standards. If they are successful, they may proceed as regular students. The policy has made university education an option for many individuals who previously had no opportunity to get academic training.

Since 1970, Brandon University has initiated the Program for Educating Native Teachers (PENT); the Indian and Metis Program for Careers through Teacher Education (IMPACTE), which has been largely replaced by the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program (BUNTEP); and the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC), which now is administered by the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. Initially, these were two-year certification programs but they now have been expanded to four-year B.Ed. programs.

The first PENT students were a group of women who had worked many years as permit teachers. To offer them formal training was in many ways a joke. Instructors had as much to learn from them as the women sought to learn from the university courses. The

instructors received especially valuable lessons about the irrelevance of mainstream educational ideas and principles. They found that many of those ideas and principles were not only irrelevant, but downright ludicrous in an isolated, northern, Cree-speaking community.

PENT has continued with relatively few changes though the students now are somewhat younger and a higher percentage of them enter the program with a complete grade 12. Though the program is open to both men and women, over 90 percent of the students are female. Students work as teacher assistants for eight months of the year, acquiring student teacher status as they progress in the program. They spend two six-week periods a year (from May to August) on campus doing course work. Courses are delivered by Brandon University staff. Throughout the year, two PENT staff members travel into the communities to supervise student teaching.

Originally, PENT was funded only by the federal department of Indian Affairs and Frontier School Division. These institutions are still involved but so are the pertinent local school board and tribal councils.

An advisory committee oversees the program. It includes representatives from each of the tribal councils, PENT students, Brandon University Faculty of Education, Department of Education and Training, Department of Indian Affairs, Frontier School Division, Manitoba Metis Federation and Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Shortly after the initiation of PENT, it became evident that more rapid ways were needed to train aboriginal teachers. IMPACTE, the first community-based program, was started in 1971 and replaced by BUNTEP in 1974. Funding, provided by the federal and provincial governments, ensures that both status Indians and Metis are eligible to take advantage of the opportunities.

Innovative methods were required to establish BUNTEP. Distance, difficult travel conditions and poor communication systems had to be overcome. Family considerations also play a major role in BUNTEP programming since over 75 percent of the students are women with family responsibilities.

Mini-campuses, called BUNTEP centres, have been developed and located in isolated communities. The main difference between the training at these centres and training on the campus in Brandon is that BUNTEP staff travel to where the students are, rather than the students moving to Brandon. This is cost-efficient and has many social benefits. It avoids disrupting the schooling of the students' children and helps to keep housing and community support systems in place. Students receive a living allowance and day-care subsidies as required.

The program is run by an administrative team located on the Brandon campus. The team consists of a director, assistant director, counsellor-community liaison officer, a faculty member in charge of student teaching and a faculty member in charge of program planning. Every centre has a coordinator or an administrator who is responsible for local administration, counselling, student teaching and community liaison work. Coordinators may also do some teaching, provided they hold an M.Ed. degree.

Courses are delivered by a cadre of travelling professors who deliver all courses in blocks of time. When one set of courses is finished, they play 'musical chairs' and move on to different centres. At present, the cadre includes seven professors in chemistry, educational psychology, English, geography, history and Native studies as well as various other areas of specialization in education.

Communities applying for BUNTEP centres usually need to be placed on a waiting list. A community is considered if it has the facilities to house the centre--including a classroom, library-resource room and office space. As well, it must have living accommodation for the centre coordinator or administrator and a place to stay for travelling professors. The community must be large enough to have 20 to 30 applicants and local people willing to participate in an advisory committee, consisting of the centre coordinator or administrator, school principal, students and community representatives. The communities are selected by an

advisory committee, including representatives of BUNTEP, faculty of education, provincial government and various Native organizations.

PENT students are found in most isolated communities in Manitoba, both large and small and too numerous to name. BUNTEP, because of the nature of the program, has been limited to the larger communities, such as Camperville, Cross Lake, Fairford, Garden Hill, Grand Rapids, Nelson House, Norway House, Oxford House, St. Theresa Point, Split Lake, Swan River, Thompson and Wanipigpow. In addition, two regional centres operate in Cranberry Portage and Thompson. These centres cater to students from communities too small to have centres of their own.

The programs have advantages as well as disadvantages. Historically, and to some extent even today, they have been criticized for being watered-down. This may stem from an elitist attitude toward learning or the noted preference of many northerners to use Cree or Saulteaux as their daily working language. Such criticism may overlook that students in these programs possess a wealth of knowledge. The critics overlook this knowledge because often it has not been validated in institutions of higher learning.

Lack of English skills can jeopardize the success of aboriginal people in university. Both PENT and BUNTEP, therefore, have remedial components to provide compensatory education in English communication as well as mathematics and science skills.

The lack of opportunity for BUNTEP students to move out of their home communities can be a disadvantage. Students have the option to do one semester of course work on campus but often they cannot take advantage of this opportunity because of family responsibilities. Students that do come to the campus usually appreciate the chance to get together with students from other communities which helps them establish links with student teachers outside their home communities and become familiar with different systems.

Choices of courses are limited. PENT students have more choice than BUNTEP students but not as many as students on campus.

All BUNTEP students must take the same course at the same time for the program to function. They may not agree with the selection of courses and may have to make compromises. Choice is further restricted by the limited availability of travelling professors. Improved communication systems, distance education systems and correspondence courses may alleviate some of these problems in the future.

The advantages of the programs outweigh their disadvantages. The success rates of students in these programs have been found to be higher than of similar students who attend conventionally structured programs. Furthermore, through the Brandon University programs, money intended for aboriginal education is used more efficiently because it is used directly for the benefit of Native people.

The programs acknowledge and respect Native cultures, teach Native languages and incorporate relevant materials. BUNTEP students receive more individual instruction time from professors than on any other university campus in Canada. PENT hires teaching assistants whose primary task is to help students individually or in small groups.

Adequate counselling plays an important role in the success of the programs. The importance of staff members coming from within the culture and being able to communicate with local people in their language cannot be overestimated. PENT hires a Native counsellor for the summer when students are on campus. BUNTEP has always had at least one Native person who counsels students and does most of the community liaison work.

Virtually all PENT and BUNTEP graduates are employed, most in teaching positions in their home communities. This has had a profound effect on helping Native communities obtain and successfully operate locally controlled schools. Every Native community in Manitoba now has at least several role models for children to emulate and some Native teachers have been hired to teach in Manitoba's cities. As well, graduates are holding various educational positions in the civil service, Native organizations,

universities and tribal councils.

The success of the program is reflected also in the programs modelled after PENT and BUNTEP that have been developed elsewhere in Canada as well as in other countries, such as Swaziland and Malawi.

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